

PRAYAS4IAS

AN INITIATIVE BY THE PRAYAS INDIA

SPECIAL ISSUE MARCH WEEK 1



Special Issue

March (Week 1)

Contents

All about Assam's tea garden workers	2
All about Jammu's purple revolution: Aroma Mission	3





All about Assam's tea garden workers

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra visited tea gardens in Assam, interacted with the workers and went to their huts, and posed for photographs. To bolster the symbolism, one of the photographs showed her plucking tea leaves with a basket held with a strap over her head, like the women workers traditionally do.

Who are the tea garden workers in Assam?

- Assam accounts for over half of India's total tea production. Tea garden workers were brought by the British from states like Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal afterwards of 1860.
- Till today it is marked by exploitation, economic backwardness, poor health conditions and low literacy rates.
- At a public event in Assam on February 7, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that no one could appreciate the special taste of Assam tea more than him. He said he always considered the development of Assam and Assam's tea garden workers together and that there was an international "conspiracy" against Assam tea.
- The "conspiracy" that he mentioned is assumed to be a veiled reference to a 'toolkit' shared by environmental activist Greta Thunberg wherein it was said that India's 'yoga and chai' image should be disrupted as one of the steps taken against the contentious farm laws.

What is their political significance?

- The tea tribe community — comprising 17 per cent of the state's population — is a deciding factor in almost 40 Assam assembly seats out of the 126. The community is spread over 800 tea gardens plus several unorganised small gardens of Assam — living mostly in residential quarters adjacent to gardens.
- The community is one of most marginalised in Assam but is also a large vote bank. The BJP has a strong voter base in the community now, overcoming an earlier Congress stronghold. Both organisational penetration within the community and reaping the benefits of welfare schemes have benefitted the saffron party.
- In 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP won the two seats — Rameshwar Teli from the Dibrugarh seat and Pallab Lochan Das from Tezpur — wherein the tea garden workers are a dominant electoral force. Both Teli and Das belong to the garden workers' community. Teli is an MoS in the Centre now.

What is the issue of the per day wage of tea garden workers?

- Increasing wages of tea garden workers has been a major demand of the community and poll plank. Although the tea garden managements pay the wages, the government fixes it.
- In 2017, the Assam government formed an advisory board to fix minimum wages of tea workers — the board recommended an amount of Rs 351. The next year, as an interim measure, the Assam government hiked daily wages Rs 137 to Rs 167.
- Last month, in what was seen as a step taken keeping in view the elections, the Assam government increased the wages of tea garden workers from Rs 167 to Rs 217. Tea gardens workers' bodies have already expressed their dissatisfaction with the hike, which they consider inadequate.
- Paban Singh Ghatowar, a most influential tea tribe leader, five time Congress MP from Dibrugarh and former Union minister, told The Indian Express in February, "During 2016 elections, the BJP had promised to increase the wages to Rs 351. Now they are increasing by Rs 50 only because of the



elections. They think they can dole out money and buy votes from the garden community. Are one time financial benefit schemes enough for the welfare of a community?"

All about Jammu's purple revolution: Aroma Mission

(Source: [Down to Earth](#))

Context: *Bharat Bhushan used to cultivate maize, like most farmers of Khillani village in Jammu and Kashmir's Doda district. Then he switched to lavender in 2010, when the state's tourism department introduced it for beautification. There was a lot of ridicule from fellow villagers, but Bhushan had his heart set on the fragrant, bushy plants of an uncommon hue. Then, in 2016, the Centre launched **Aroma Mission** to boost cultivation of plants like lavender which have aromatic medicinal properties.*

Details:

- Around 500 farmers from Bhushan's district have seen similar gains after switching from maize to the perennial flowering plant.
- Bhushan started small, cultivating around 0.1 hectare of land.
- As the profits started flowing in, he started replacing maize plant on more land around his house with lavender till the flowers covered almost ten times the area than a decade ago. He also owns two lavender nurseries from which are sought after across Jammu.



Purple economy

- Lavender oil sells for at least Rs 10,000 per litre, according to scientists from Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine, Jammu (IIIM Jammu), the two bodies responsible for taking the Aroma Mission forward.
- Under the mission, which was launched to move from imported aromatic oils to homegrown varieties, first-time farmers were given free lavender saplings and those who have cultivated lavender before were charged Rs 5-6 per sapling.
- A minimum of 40l of lavender oil is produced from lavender grown over one hectare of land. However, because Doda is flatter than desirable, 32-40l of lavender oil can be extracted per hectare from the local produce.
- Lavender water, which separates from lavender oil, is used to make incense sticks. Hydrosol, which is formed after distillation from the flowers, is used to make soaps and room fresheners.
- The farmers get help from IIIM-Jammu to sell their produce. Mumbai-based companies like Ajmal Biotech private limited, Aditi International and Navnetri Gamika, which manufacture aromatic products like candles and aroma oils are their primary buyers.
- These companies procure lavender extracts from the farmers in Doda and other J&K districts like Rajouri, Ramban and Pulwama where Aroma Mission was introduced in 2018.
- There are four distillation units set up by CSIR-IIIM Jammu in Doda and two more have been proposed to meet the increased demand. Farmers from remote locations of district Doda reach these plants for extraction of lavender oil.
- Apart from increasing farm incomes, lavender cultivation also provided employment to the district's women farmers.



- Women are not allowed to work away from home in villages so I encouraged them to cultivate lavender around their homes because it is profitable and would make them financially independent.
- The best thing about the lavender plant is that animals like monkeys and cows do not eat or destroy it. It does not require much water or fertilizers and cow dung is enough.

The next phase

- On February 9, 2021, CSIR-IIIM-Jammu announced Aroma Mission phase 2 after the success of the first phase.
- The inauguration was attended by farmers from Uttarakhand, Nagaland and Assam. Impressed by the success of Doda's lavender farmers, the Uttarakhand authorities invited some of them to train their farmers.
- At present, large-scale lavender cultivation is limited to J&K but governments in Himachal Pradesh, Arunahal Pradesh and Uttarakhand are also encouraging their farmers to take up lavender. Small scale farming of the plant is already underway in these states.

